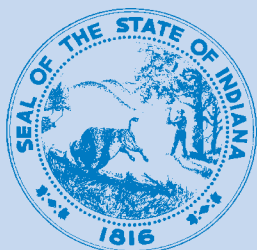


State Representative

Ed Mahern

The 2000 Session of the Indiana Legislature



How To Reach
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Spring, 2000

Dear Friends,

The 2000 session of the Indiana General Assembly ended on March 3.

We passed several significant pieces of legislation, including a plan to distribute the funds Indiana will receive from the tobacco settlement and a proposal to increase benefits for workers severely injured on the job. We also adjusted the unemployment compensation system, making improvements for both workers and employers.

I have detailed several new laws in this newsletter and have included some other information that you might find useful.

In the coming months, I will be working on interim study committees. Study committees allow legislators the opportunity to explore subjects in greater depth than is permitted during the session.

Please contact my office at 232-9600 if you have questions or concerns regarding state government.

Sincerely,



E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

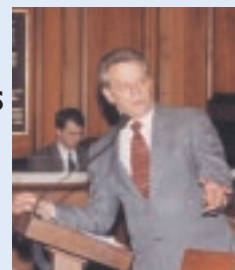
Inside this newsletter

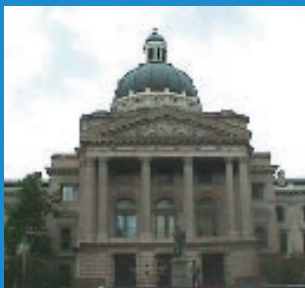
Tobacco Settlement

Prescription Drugs for Seniors

Tax Cuts

Helping Working Families





Seniors must file for expanded tax cut by May 10

The Indiana General Assembly approved an important property tax deduction in 1999. Eligible Hoosiers must file an application by May 10 in order to receive the tax break.

Last year, we increased the property tax deduction for people over 65 years of age from \$1,000 to \$2,000. We also expanded both the income limits and assessed valuation amounts that determine if a person qualifies for the deduction, resulting in more people receiving this tax cut.

To receive the deduction, a person must have a maximum annual income of less than \$25,000, and own property with a maximum assessed valuation of less than \$23,000.

In order to make sure that you can get the deduction, you must file an application with the County Auditor's office by May 10. I encourage anyone who believes he or she may qualify under the new guidelines to contact the auditor. Anyone who qualified in past years for the deduction does not have to re-apply.

Legislature allocates tobacco funds

Bi-partisan agreement to help several programs and groups

One of the biggest accomplishments of the 2000 legislative session was the enactment of legislation that will invest \$4 billion dollars from the national tobacco settlement into improving the quality of health available to all Hoosiers. I am proud to report that Indiana is one of the vanguard states that used the first portion of the tobacco settlement fund money solely for health-related programs.

The provisions of this landmark legislation outline the investment of \$112.5 million entirely into health-related services, including prescription drug assistance for low-income senior citizens.

Other priorities addressed by this measure include efforts to keep children from smoking, help Hoosiers stop smoking and direct improved health care services into areas of the state where they are most needed.

By directing the use of \$112.5 million from the national tobacco settlement into these health improvement efforts, we are confident that our state is making a wise investment in the long-term good health of our citizens. Tobacco kills 10,000 Hoosiers each year and it is time we took steps to end this tragedy.

I am particularly proud of the bi-partisan efforts to come to an agreement about how the money should be spent. Legislators from both sides of the aisle should be pleased with the hard work and dedication that went into developing a tobacco settlement initiative with such broad health benefits.

Mahern pushes for prescription drug assistance for seniors

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying basic necessities and the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make those decisions any longer.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers. Some people even have been forced to drive as far as Canada to get these drugs at a more affordable rate.

Last summer and throughout the fall I met regularly with Governor O'Bannon's staff and House Speaker John Gregg to encourage them to support low-income senior citizens by making sure prescription drug assistance would be made part of the tobacco settlement. At the request of Speaker Gregg, I worked closely on behalf of the House of Representatives with the Governor's office in drafting the eventual legislation that earmarked millions to prescription drug assistance for seniors living on fixed incomes.

I will continue to support issues that have a positive impact on the health and financial well-being of senior citizens. Prescription drug assistance is a major success story for this year's legislative session. Through bi-partisan cooperation and compromise, Indiana's low-income senior citizens will receive the assistance they need to live a healthier, happier life.



Rep. Mahern with Rep. Crawford.

Well-water users will now have access to treated municipal water

I sponsored a bill this past legislative session that will extend public water utility services for some Indianapolis areas that are currently using well-water. Those citizens in House District 97 who are connected to faulty and/or contaminated wells could be switched over to treated municipal water once they meet certain criteria.

The first step is to determine which homes are currently hooked up to well-water. Then those wells will be inspected for contaminants and whether they provide water service to at least a block of homes that meet median household income requirements. Local health departments will gather this information, and will report its findings to the nearest public utility that offers water service. The municipality can give an estimate of the cost for extending water service to the new homes and request its approval from the Board of Commissioners. Upon approval, the project will be undertaken and, once completed, the existing wells will be plugged and abandoned.

This legislation will give all citizens living within municipal boundaries the opportunity to gain access to better-quality water. Old and deteriorating wells pose inherent health risks and should be replaced. Our goal must be to make safe and pure drinking water accessible to everyone in Indiana.

Helping working men and women

In a recent study released by the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, Indiana ranked 49th in the level of benefits awarded to workers injured while on the job. While this statistic was the source of controversy among groups such as the Indiana Manufacturer's Association and labor parties, the fact remains that Indiana lags far behind in the amount of benefits and level of care given to our injured workers. This problem was addressed this past session with ground-breaking workers' compensation legislation that will expand disability pay and benefits to those injured on the job. Another important piece of legislation geared to help Indiana workers will raise unemployment compensation over a series of 3 years.

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Additional measures to assist workers who have been laid off or fired were approved with an increase in unemployment benefits by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.



Rep. Mahem discussing legislation with Gov. O'Bannon



\$672 million in tax cuts

The 1999 biennial state budget provides \$672 million in savings for Indiana taxpayers. I have detailed some of the tax cuts below.

- *Homeowners:* Property taxes on a taxpayer's principal place of residence can be deducted up to \$2,500.

- *Senior citizens:* The income tax deduction for married seniors was increased from \$1,000 to \$1,500. Each qualified taxpayer may take this deduction — meaning married couples may now deduct \$3,000 from their adjusted gross income.

- *Dependent children:* The income tax deduction was increased from \$1,000 to \$2,500 for dependent children under age 19 and full-time students under age 24. You may reduce your Indiana adjusted gross income for each qualifying dependent.

- *Renters:* The renters' income tax deduction was increased from \$1,500 to \$2,000.

- *Small businesses:* Businesses will no longer have to "add-back" property taxes deducted on their federal returns.



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***See inside to add your name
to my e-mail update group***

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State legislative web site

The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at www.state.in.us offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

I encourage you to visit my web site at www.state.in.us/R97 and explore various items related to the legislature.

A new feature on my web site will allow you to request various House publications. We currently offer publications specifically designed for senior citizens, grade-school children, and high school students in the process of choosing a college. Other publications give a general overview of various Indiana state agencies, offer a guide to women's health and advise how to avoid being the victim of a scam. There is also a booklet available which details every bill that became law during this year's legislative session.

You may also request booklets by calling my legislative office at 232-9600.



A screen shot of my legislative home page

Top Five State Web Sites*

1. State Job Bank
2. Hoosier Lottery Homepage
3. Attorney General's Unclaimed Property Search
4. General Assembly homepage
5. Dept. of Environmental Management homepage

*Based on number of visitors as of February 25, 2000